

--SECTION--711.03(c) Petitions Relating to Abandonment

37 CFR 1.135 Abandonment for failure to reply within time period.

(a) If an applicant of a patent application fails to reply within the time period provided under Section 1.134 and Section 1.136, the application will become abandoned unless an Office action indicates otherwise.

(b) Prosecution of an application to save it from abandonment pursuant to paragraph (a) of this section must include such complete and proper reply as the condition of the application may require. The admission of, or refusal to admit, any amendment after final rejection or any amendment not responsive to the last action, or any related proceedings, will not operate to save the application from abandonment.

(c) When reply by the applicant is a bona fide attempt to advance the application to final action, and is substantially a complete reply to the non-final Office action, but consideration of some matter or compliance with some requirement has been inadvertently omitted, applicant may be given a new time period for reply under Section 1.134 to supply the omission.

37 CFR 1.137 Revival of abandoned application or lapsed patent.

(a) Unavoidable. Where the delay in reply was unavoidable, a petition may be filed to revive an abandoned application or a lapsed patent pursuant to this paragraph. A grantable petition pursuant to this paragraph must be accompanied by:

(1) The required reply, unless previously filed. In a nonprovisional application abandoned for failure to prosecute, the required reply may be met by the filing of a continuing application. In an application or patent, abandoned or lapsed for failure to pay the issue fee or any portion thereof, the required reply must be the payment of the issue fee or any outstanding balance thereof;

(2) The petition fee as set forth in Section 1.17(l);

(3) A showing to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to this paragraph was unavoidable; and

(4) Any terminal disclaimer (and fee as set forth in Section 1.20(d)) required pursuant to paragraph (c) of this section.

(b) Unintentional. Where the delay in reply was unintentional, a petition may be filed to revive an abandoned application or a lapsed patent pursuant to this paragraph. A grantable petition pursuant to this paragraph must be accompanied by:

(1) The required reply, unless previously filed. In a nonprovisional application abandoned for failure to prosecute, the required reply may be met by the filing of a continuing application. In an application or patent, abandoned or lapsed for failure to pay the issue fee or any portion thereof, the required reply must be the payment of the issue fee or any outstanding balance thereof;

(2) The petition fee as set forth in Section 1.17(m);

(3) A statement that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to this paragraph was unintentional. The Commissioner may require additional information where there is a question whether the delay was unintentional; and

(4) Any terminal disclaimer (and fee as set forth in Section 1.20(d)) required pursuant to paragraph (c) of this section.

(c) In a design application, a utility application filed before June 8, 1995, or a plant application filed before June 8, 1995, any petition to revive pursuant to this section must be accompanied by a terminal disclaimer and fee as set forth in Section 1.321 dedicating to the public a terminal part of the term of any patent granted thereon equivalent to the period of abandonment of the application. Any terminal disclaimer pursuant to this paragraph must also apply to any patent granted on any continuing application that contains a specific reference under 35 U.S.C. 120, 121, or 365(c) to the application for which revival is sought. The provisions of this paragraph do not apply to lapsed patents.

(d) Any request for reconsideration or review of a decision refusing to revive an abandoned application or lapsed patent upon petition filed pursuant to this section, to be considered timely, must be filed within two months of the decision refusing to revive or within such time as set in the decision. Unless a decision indicates otherwise, this time period may be extended under the provisions of Section 1.136.

(e) A provisional application, abandoned for failure to timely respond to an Office requirement, may be revived pursuant to this section so as to be pending for a period of no longer than twelve months from its filing date. Under no circumstances will a provisional application be regarded as pending after twelve months from its filing date.

37 CFR 1.181 Petition to the Commissioner.

(a) Petition may be taken to the Commissioner: (1) From any action or requirement of any examiner in the ex parte prosecution of an application which is not subject to appeal to the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences or to the court; (2) In cases in which a statute or the rules specify that the matter is to be determined directly by or reviewed by the Commissioner; and (3) To invoke the supervisory authority of the Commissioner in appropriate circumstances. For petitions in interferences, see Section 1.644.

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(f) Except as otherwise provided in these rules, any such petition not filed within 2 months from the action complained of, may be dismissed as untimely. The mere filing of a petition will not stay the period for reply to an Examiner's action which may be running against an application, nor act as a stay of other proceedings.

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I. PETITION TO WITHDRAW HOLDING OF ABANDONMENT

A petition to revive an abandoned application (discussed below) should not be confused with a petition from an examiner's holding of abandonment. Where an applicant contends that the application is not in fact abandoned (e.g., there is disagreement as to the sufficiency of the reply, or as to controlling dates), a petition under 37 CFR 1.181(a) requesting withdrawal of the holding of abandonment is the appropriate course of action, and such petition does not require a fee. Where there is no dispute as to whether an application is abandoned (e.g., the applicant's contentions merely involve the cause of abandonment), a petition under 37 CFR 1.137 (accompanied by the appropriate petition fee) is necessary to revive the abandoned application.

37 CFR 1.181(f) provides that, *inter alia*, except as otherwise provided, any petition not filed within 2 months from the action complained of may be dismissed as untimely. Therefore, any petition (under 37 CFR 1.181) to withdraw the holding of abandonment not filed within 2 months of the mail date of a notice of abandonment (the action complained of) may be dismissed as untimely. 37 CFR 1.181(f).

Rather than dismiss an untimely petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment under 37 CFR 1.181(f), the Office may treat an untimely petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment on its merits on the condition that, in any design application, any utility application filed before June 8, 1995, or any plant application filed before June 8, 1995, the petition is accompanied by a terminal disclaimer dedicating to the public a terminal part of the term of any patent granted thereon equivalent to the period between the mail

date of the notice of abandonment and the filing date of such petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment. See 37 CFR 1.183 (the Office may suspend or waive the requirements of 37 CFR 1.181(f), subject to such other requirements as may be imposed). The Office may treat an untimely petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment on its merits in a utility or plant application filed on or after June 8, 1995, on the condition that the petition is accompanied by a terminal disclaimer dedicating to the public a terminal part of the term of any patent granted thereon that would extend beyond the date 20 years from the filing date of the application, or the earliest application to which the application specifically refers under 35 U.S.C. 120, 121, or 365(c). In either case, the terminal disclaimer must also apply to any patent granted on any application that claims the benefit of the filing date of the application under 35 U.S.C. 120, 121, or 365(c). Such a terminal disclaimer is not required under 37 CFR 1.137(c) because abandonment of an application is a per se failure to exercise due diligence, and as such, an applicant cannot obtain patent term extension under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) due to prosecution delay caused by abandonment of the application. Where a petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment is granted, the application is considered to never have been abandoned and, as such, the prosecution delay caused by the treatment of the application as abandoned is not considered a per se failure to exercise due diligence. Thus a terminal disclaimer is required to avoid granting patent term extension under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) due to prosecution delay caused by the treatment of the application as abandoned.

In any event, where the record indicates that the applicant intentionally delayed the filing of a petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment, the Office may simply dismiss the petition as untimely (37 CFR 1.181(f)) solely on the basis of such intentional delay in taking action in the application without further addressing the merits of the petition. Obviously, intentional delay in seeking the revival of an abandoned application precludes relief under 37 CFR 1.137(a) or (b) (discussed below).

II. PETITION TO WITHDRAW HOLDING OF ABANDONMENT BASED ON FAILURE TO RECEIVE OFFICE ACTION

In Delgar v. Schulyer, 172 USPQ 513 (D.D.C. 1971), the court decided that the Office should mail a new Notice of Allowance in view of the evidence presented in support of the contention that the applicant's representative did not receive the original Notice of Allowance. Under the reasoning of Delgar, an allegation that an Office action was never received may be considered in a petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment. If adequately supported, the Office may grant the petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment and remail the Office action. That is, the reasoning of Delgar is applicable regardless of whether an application is held abandoned for failure to timely pay the issue fee (35 U.S.C. 151) or for failure to prosecute (35 U.S.C. 133).

To minimize costs and burdens to practitioners and the Office, the Office has modified the showing required to establish nonreceipt of an Office action. The showing required to establish nonreceipt of an Office communication must include a statement from the practitioner stating that the Office communication was not received by the practitioner and attesting to the fact that a search of the file jacket and docket records indicates that the Office communication was not received. A copy of the docket record where the nonreceived Office communication would have been entered had it been received and docketed must be attached to and referenced in practitioner's statement. See Notice entitled "Withdrawing the Holding of Abandonment When Office Actions Are Not Received," 1156 O.G. 53 (November 16, 1993).

The showing outlined above may not be sufficient if there are circumstances that point to a conclusion that the Office action may have been lost after receipt rather than a conclusion that the Office action was lost in the mail (e.g., if the practitioner has a history of not receiving Office actions).

Evidence of nonreceipt of an Office communication or action (e.g., Notice of Abandonment or an advisory action) other than that action to which reply was required to avoid abandonment would not warrant withdrawal of the holding of abandonment. Abandonment takes place by operation of law for failure to reply to an Office action or timely pay the issue fee, not by operation of the mailing of a Notice of Abandonment. See Lorenz v. Finkl, 333 F.2d 885, 889-90, 142 USPQ 26, 29-30 (CCPA 1964); Krahn v.

Commissioner, 15 USPQ2d 1823, 1824 (E.D. Va 1990); In re Application of Fischer, 6 USPQ2d-1573, 1574 (Comm'r Pat. 1988).

Two additional procedures are available for reviving an application that has become abandoned due to a failure to reply to an Office Action: (1) a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) based upon unavoidable delay; and (2) a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(b) based on unintentional delay.

III. PETITIONS TO REVIVE AN ABANDONED APPLICATION, OR ACCEPT LATE PAYMENT OF ISSUE FEE

37 CFR 1.137 provides for the revival of abandoned applications and lapsed patents for the failure:

- (A) to timely reply to an Office requirement in a provisional application;
- (B) to timely prosecute in a nonprovisional application;
- (C) to timely pay the issue fee for a design application;
- (D) to timely pay the issue fee for a utility or plant application; and
- (E) to timely pay any outstanding balance of the issue fee (lapsed patents).

A petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) requires:

- (A) the required reply, unless previously filed;
- (B) the petition fee as set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(l);
- (C) a showing to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) was unavoidable; and
- (D) any terminal disclaimer required pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(c).

A petition under 37 CFR 1.137(b) requires:

- (A) the required reply, unless previously filed;
- (B) the petition fee as set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(m);
- (C) a statement that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(b) was unintentional; and
- (D) any terminal disclaimer required pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(c).

The Commissioner may require additional information where there is a question whether the delay was unintentional.

A. Reply Requirement

Unlike a petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment, a petition to revive under 37 CFR 1.137 must be accompanied by, inter alia, the required reply. See Ex parte Richardson, 1906 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 83 (1905) ("This Office has no authority to revive a case upon which no action has been taken within [the period for reply], but merely has authority to determine after an action is taken whether the delay in

presenting it was unavoidable."). Generally, the required reply is the reply sufficient to have avoided abandonment, had such reply been timely filed.

1. Abandonment for Failure to Pay the Issue Fee

While the revival of applications abandoned for failure to timely prosecute and for failure to timely pay the issue fee are incorporated together in 37 CFR 1.137, the statutory provisions for the revival of an application abandoned for failure to timely prosecute and for failure to timely submit the issue fee are mutually exclusive. See *Brenner v. Ebbert*, 398 F.2d 762, 157 USPQ 609 (D.C. Cir. 1968). 35 U.S.C. 151 authorizes the acceptance of a delayed payment of the issue fee, if the issue fee "is submitted ... and the delay in payment is shown to have been unavoidable." 35 U.S.C. 41(a)(7) likewise authorizes the acceptance of an "unintentionally delayed payment of the fee for issuing each patent." Thus, 35 U.S.C. 41(a)(7) and 151 each require payment of the issue fee as a condition of reviving an application abandoned or patent lapsed for failure to pay the issue fee. Therefore, the filing of a continuing application without payment of the issue fee or any outstanding balance thereof is not an acceptable reply in an application abandoned or patent lapsed for failure to pay the issue fee or any portion thereof.

The Notice of Allowance requires the timely payment of the issue fee in effect on the date of its mailing to avoid abandonment of the application. In instances in which there is an increase in the issue fee by the time of payment of the issue fee required in the Notice of Allowance, the Office will mail a notice requiring payment of the balance of the issue fee then in effect. See *In re Mills*, 12 USPQ2d 1847, 1848 (Comm'r Pat. 1989). The phrase "for failure to pay the issue fee or any portion thereof" applies to those instances in which the applicant fails to pay either the issue fee required in the Notice of Allowance or the balance of the issue fee required in a subsequent notice. In such instances, the reply must be the issue fee then in effect, if no portion of the issue fee was previously submitted, or any outstanding balance of the issue fee then in effect, if a portion of the issue fee was previously submitted.

2. Abandonment for Failure to Reply in a Nonprovisional Application

A reply to a non-final action in a nonprovisional application abandoned for failure to prosecute may be either an argument or an amendment under 37 CFR 1.111, whereas a reply under 37 CFR 1.113 to a final action "must include cancellation of, or appeal from the rejection of, each claim so rejected." Accordingly, in a nonprovisional application abandoned for failure to reply to a final action, the reply required for consideration of a petition to revive must be:

- (A) a Notice of Appeal (and appeal fee);
- (B) an amendment that cancels all the rejected claims or otherwise prima facie places the application in condition for allowance; or
- (C) the filing of a continuing application.

When a notice of appeal is the reply filed pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a)(1) or 1.137(b)(1), the time period under 37 CFR 1.192 for filing the appeal brief will be set by the Commissioner in the decision granting the petition. In those situations where abandonment occurred because of the failure to file an appeal brief, the reply required pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a)(1) or 1.137(b)(1) must be either: (A) an appeal brief in compliance with 37 CFR 1.192(c) (and appeal brief fee); or (B) the filing of a continuing application.

In a nonprovisional application abandoned for failure to prosecute, the filing of a continuing application is a permissive reply. An applicant in a nonprovisional application abandoned for failure to prosecute may file a reply under 37 CFR 1.111 to a non-final Office action or a reply under 37 CFR 1.113 (e.g., Notice of Appeal) to a final Office action, or may simply file a continuing application as the required reply. The Office, however, may require the filing of a continuing application (or request for further examination pursuant to 37 CFR 1.129(a)) to meet the reply requirement of 37 CFR 1.137(a)(1) (or 37 CFR 1.137(b)(1)) where, under the circumstances of the application, treating a reply under 37 CFR 1.111 or

1.113 would place an inordinate burden on the Office. Exemplary circumstances of when treating a reply under 37 CFR 1.111 or 1.113 may place an inordinate burden on the Office are where:

- (A) an application has been abandoned for an inordinate period of time;
- (B) an application file contains multiple or conflicting replies to the last Office action; and
- (C) the reply or replies submitted under 37 CFR 1.137(a)(1) (or 37 CFR 1.137(b)(1)) are questionable as to compliance with 37 CFR 1.111 or 1.113.

An application subject to a final action in which a proposed amendment under 37 CFR 1.116 is filed as the required reply will normally be routed by the Office of Petitions to the examining group to determine whether a proposed amendment places the application in condition for allowance prior to granting any petition to revive such application. The patent examiner is instructed that if the reply places the application in condition for allowance, the patent examiner should write in the margin of the reply "OK to enter upon revival." If, on the other hand, the reply would not place the application in condition for allowance, the patent examiner is instructed to complete form PTOL-303 and return the unmailed form to the Office of Petitions with the application. If the petition is otherwise grantable and the patent examiner indicates that the reply places the application in condition for allowance, the petition will be granted. If such an amendment does not place the application into condition for allowance, the petition will not be granted. A copy of the form PTOL-303 is not mailed with the decision on the petition but merely serves as an advisory to the Office of Petitions regarding the decision of the patent examiner on the amendment after final rejection.

The grant of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137 is not a determination that any reply under 37 CFR 1.111 is complete. Where the proposed reply is to a non-final Office action, the petition may be granted if the reply appears to be bona fide. After revival of the application, the patent examiner may, upon more detailed review, determine that the reply is lacking in some respect. In this limited situation, the patent examiner should send out a letter giving a 1-month shortened statutory period under 37 CFR 1.135(c) for correction of the error or omission. Extensions of time under 37 CFR 1.136(a) are permitted. If applicant does not correct the omission within the shortened statutory period (including any extension), the application is again abandoned.

B. Petition Fee Requirement

35 U.S.C. 41(a)(7) provides that a petition for the revival of an unintentionally abandoned application or for the unintentional delayed payment of the issue fee must be accompanied by a petition fee of \$820 (current fee is set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(m)), unless the petition is filed under 35 U.S.C. 133 or 151 (on the basis of unavoidable delay), in which case the fee is \$78 (current fee is set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(l)). Thus, unless the circumstances warrant the withdrawal of the holding of abandonment (i.e., it is determined that the application is not properly held abandoned), the payment of a petition fee to obtain the revival of an abandoned application is a statutory prerequisite to revival of the abandoned application, and cannot be waived.

In addition, the phrase "[o]n filing" in 35 U.S.C. 41(a)(7) means that the petition fee is required for the filing (and not merely the grant) of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137. See H.R. Rep. No. 542, 97th Cong., 2d Sess. 6 (1982), reprinted in 1982 U.S.C.C.A.N. 770 ("[t]he fees set forth in this section are due on filing the petition"). Therefore, the Office: (A) will not refund the petition fee required by 37 CFR 1.17(l) or 1.17(m), regardless of whether the petition under 37 CFR 1.137 is dismissed or denied; and (B) will not reach the merits of any petition under 37 CFR 1.137 lacking the requisite petition fee.

The phrase "unless the petition is filed under [35 U.S.C.] 133 or 151" signifies that petitions to revive filed on the basis of "unavoidable" delay (under 35 U.S.C. 133 or 151) are a subset of petitions to revive filed on the basis of unintentional delay. That is, "unavoidable" delay and "unintentional" delay are not alternatives; "unavoidable" delay is the epitome of "unintentional" delay. Any petition to revive an abandoned application or lapsed patent must meet the minimal "unintentional" delay threshold, and an

applicant need only pay the fee specified in 37 CFR 1.17(l) (rather than the fee specified in 37 CFR 1.17(m)) if the petition is also accompanied by an adequate showing that the entire delay in filing the required reply, from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a), was unavoidable.

C. Unintentional and Unavoidable Delay

1. Unintentional Delay

The legislative history of Public Law 97-247, Section 3, 96 Stat. 317 (1982), reveals that the purpose of 35 U.S.C. 41(a)(7) is to permit the Office to have more discretion than in 35 U.S.C. 133 or 151 to revive abandoned applications in appropriate circumstances, but places a limit on this discretion stating that "[u]nder this section a petition accompanied by [the requisite fee] would not be granted where the abandonment or the failure to pay the fee for issuing the patent was intentional as opposed to being unintentional or unavoidable." H.R. Rep. No. 542, 97th Cong., 2d Sess. 6-7 (1982), reprinted in 1982 U.S.C.C.A.N. 770-71. A delay resulting from a deliberately chosen course of action on the part of the applicant is not an "unintentional" delay within the meaning of 37 CFR 1.137(b).

Where the applicant deliberately permits an application to become abandoned (e.g., due to a conclusion that the claims are unpatentable, that a rejection in an Office action cannot be overcome, or that the invention lacks sufficient commercial value to justify continued prosecution), the abandonment of such application is considered to be a deliberately chosen course of action, and the resulting delay cannot be considered as "unintentional" within the meaning of 37 CFR 1.137(b). See *In re Application of G*, 11 USPQ2d 1378, 1380 (Comm'r Pat. 1989). An intentional course of action is not rendered unintentional when, upon reconsideration, the applicant changes his or her mind as to the course of action that should have been taken. See *In re Maldague*, 10 USPQ2d 1477, 1478 (Comm'r Pat. 1988).

A delay resulting from a deliberately chosen course of action on the part of the applicant does not become an "unintentional" delay within the meaning of 37 CFR 1.137(b) because:

- (A) the applicant does not consider the claims to be patentable over the references relied upon in an outstanding Office action;
- (B) the applicant does not consider the allowed or patentable claims to be of sufficient breadth or scope to justify the financial expense of obtaining a patent;
- (C) the applicant does not consider any patent to be of sufficient value to justify the financial expense of obtaining the patent;
- (D) the applicant does not consider any patent to be of sufficient value to maintain an interest in obtaining the patent; or
- (E) the applicant remains interested in eventually obtaining a patent, but simply seeks to defer patent fees and patent prosecution expenses.

Likewise, a change in circumstances that occurred subsequent to the abandonment of an application does not render "unintentional" the delay resulting from a previous deliberate decision to permit an application to be abandoned. These matters simply confuse the question of whether there was a deliberate decision not to continue the prosecution of an application with why there was a deliberate decision not to continue the prosecution of an application.

Form PTO/SB/64 may be used to file a petition for revival of an unintentionally abandoned application.

2. Unavoidable Delay

As discussed above, "unavoidable" delay is the epitome of "unintentional" delay. Thus, an intentional delay precludes revival under 37 CFR 1.137(a) ("unavoidable" delay) or 37 CFR 1.137(b) ("unintentional" delay). See *Maldaque*, 10 USPQ2d at 1478.

Decisions on reviving abandoned applications on the basis of "unavoidable" delay have adopted the reasonably prudent person standard in determining if the delay was unavoidable:

The word "unavoidable" . . . is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business. It permits them in the exercise of this care to rely upon the ordinary and trustworthy agencies of mail and telegraph, worthy and reliable employees, and such other means and instrumentalities as are usually employed in such important business. If unexpectedly, or through the unforeseen fault or imperfection of these agencies and instrumentalities, there occurs a failure, it may properly be said to be unavoidable, all other conditions of promptness in its rectification being present.

In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (1912)(quoting *Pratt*, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (1887)); see also *Winkler v. Ladd*, 221 F. Supp. 550, 552, 138 USPQ 666, 667-68 (D.D.C. 1963), aff'd, 143 USPQ 172 (D.C. Cir. 1963); *Ex parte Henrich*, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141 (1913). In addition, decisions on revival are made on a "case-by-case basis, taking all the facts and circumstances into account." *Smith v. Mossinghoff*, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 USPQ 977, 982 (D.C. Cir. 1982). Finally, a petition cannot be granted where a petitioner has failed to meet his or her burden of establishing that the delay was "unavoidable." *Haines v. Quigg*, 673 F. Supp. 314, 316-17, 5 USPQ2d 1130, 1131-32 (N.D. Ind. 1987).

A delay resulting from an error (e.g., a docketing error) on the part of an employee in the performance of a clerical function may provide the basis for a showing of "unavoidable" delay, provided it is shown that:

- (A) the error was the cause of the delay at issue;
- (B) there was in place a business routine for performing the clerical function that could reasonably be relied upon to avoid errors in its performance; and
- (C) the employee was sufficiently trained and experienced with regard to the function and routine for its performance that reliance upon such employee represented the exercise of due care.

See *In re Egbers*, 6 USPQ2d 1869, 1872 (Comm'r Pat. 1988), rev'd on other grounds sub nom., *Theodor Groz & Sohne & Ernst Bechert Nadelfabrik KG v. Quigg*, 10 USPQ2d 1787 (D.D.C. 1988); *In re Katrapat*, 6 USPQ2d 1863, 1867-68 (Comm'r Pat. 1988). For example, where an application becomes abandoned as a consequence of a change of correspondence address (the Office action being mailed to the old, uncorrected address and failing to reach the applicant in sufficient time to permit a timely reply) an adequate showing of "unavoidable" delay will require a showing that due care was taken to adhere to the requirement for prompt notification in each concerned application of the change of address (see MPEP Section 601.03), and must include an adequate showing that a timely notification of the change of address was filed in the application concerned, and in a manner reasonably calculated to call attention to the fact that it was a notification of a change of address. The following do not constitute proper notification of a change in correspondence address:

- (A) the mere inclusion, in a paper filed in an application for another purpose, of an address differing from the previously provided correspondence address, without mention of the fact that an address change was being made;
- (B) the notification on a paper listing plural applications as being affected (except as provided for under the Customer Number practice - see MPEP Section 403); or
- (C) the lack of notification, or belated notification, to the Patent and Trademark Office of the change in correspondence address.

Delay resulting from the lack of knowledge or improper application of the patent statute, rules of practice or the MPEP, however, does not constitute "unavoidable" delay. See Haines, 673 F. Supp. at 317, 5 USPQ2d at 1132; Vincent v. Mossinghoff, 230 USPQ 621, 624 (D.D.C. 1985); Smith v. Diamond, 209 USPQ 1091 (D.D.C. 1981); Potter v. Dann, 201 USPQ 574 (D.D.C. 1978); Ex parte Murray, 1891 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 130, 131 (1891). For example, as 37 CFR 1.116 and 1.135(b) are manifest that proceedings concerning an amendment after final rejection will not operate to avoid abandonment of the application in the absence of a timely and proper appeal, a delay is not "unavoidable" when the applicant simply permits the maximum extendable statutory period for reply to a final Office action to expire while awaiting a notice of allowance or other action. Likewise, as a "reasonably prudent person" would file papers or fees in compliance with 37 CFR 1.8 or 1.10 to ensure their timely filing in the PTO, as well as preserve adequate evidence of such filing, a delay caused by an applicant's failure to file papers or fees in compliance with 37 CFR 1.8 and 1.10 does not constitute "unavoidable" delay. See Krahm, 15 USPQ2d at 1825. Finally, a delay caused by an applicant's lack of knowledge or improper application of the patent statute, rules of practice or the MPEP is not rendered "unavoidable" due to: (A) the applicant's reliance upon oral advice from PTO employees; or (B) the PTO's failure to advise the applicant of any deficiency in sufficient time to permit the applicant to take corrective action. See In re Sivertz, 227 USPQ 255, 256 (Comm'r Pat. 1985).

35 U.S.C. 133 and 151 each require a showing that the "delay" was "unavoidable," which requires not only a showing that the delay which resulted in the abandonment of the application was unavoidable, but also a showing of unavoidable delay until the filing of a petition to revive. See In re Application of Takao, 17 USPQ2d 1155 (Comm'r Pat. 1990). The burden of continuing the process of presenting a grantable petition in a timely manner likewise remains with the applicant until the applicant is informed that the petition is granted. Id. at 1158. Thus, an applicant seeking to revive an "unavoidably" abandoned application must cause a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) to be filed without delay (i.e., promptly upon becoming notified, or otherwise becoming aware, of the abandonment of the application).

An applicant who fails to file a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) "promptly" upon becoming notified, or otherwise becoming aware, of the abandonment of the application will not be able to show that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) was unavoidable. The removal of the language in 37 CFR 1.137(a) requiring that any petition thereunder be "promptly filed after the applicant is notified of, or otherwise becomes aware of, the abandonment" should not be viewed as: (A) permitting an applicant, upon becoming notified, or otherwise becoming aware, of the abandonment of the application, to delay the filing of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a); or (B) changing (or modifying) the result in In re Application of S, 8 USPQ2d 1630 (Comm'r Pat. 1988), in which a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) was denied due to the applicant's deliberate deferral in filing a petition under 37 CFR 1.137. An applicant who deliberately chooses to delay the filing of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137 (as in Application of S, 8 USPQ2d at 1632) will not be able to show that "the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to [37 CFR 1.137(a)] was unavoidable" or even make an appropriate statement that "the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to [37 CFR 1.137(b)] was unintentional."

The dismissal or denial of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) does not preclude an applicant from obtaining relief pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(b) on the basis of unintentional delay (unless the decision dismissing or denying the petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) indicates otherwise). In such an instance, a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(b) may be filed accompanied by the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(m), the required reply, a statement that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(b) was unintentional, and any terminal disclaimer required by 37 CFR 1.137(c).

Form PTO/SB/61 may be used to file a petition for revival of an unavoidably abandoned application.

D. Delay Until the Filing of a Grantable Petition

There are three periods to be considered during the evaluation of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137:

- (A) the delay in reply that originally resulted in the abandonment;
- (B) the delay in filing an initial petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137 to revive the application; and
- (C) the delay in filing a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137 to revive the application.

As discussed above, the abandonment of an application is considered to be a deliberately chosen course of action, and the resulting delay cannot be considered as "unintentional" within the meaning of 37 CFR 1.137(b), where the applicant deliberately permits the application to become abandoned. See Application of G, 11 USPQ2d at 1380. Likewise, where the applicant deliberately chooses not to seek or persist in seeking the revival of an abandoned application, or where the applicant deliberately chooses to delay seeking the revival of an abandoned application, the resulting delay in seeking revival of the abandoned application cannot be considered as "unintentional" within the meaning of 37 CFR 1.137(b). An intentional delay resulting from a deliberate course of action chosen by the applicant is not affected by:

- (A) the correctness of the applicant's (or applicant's representative's) decision to abandon the application or not to seek or persist in seeking revival of the application;
- (B) the correctness or propriety of a rejection, or other objection, requirement, or decision by the Office; or
- (C) the discovery of new information or evidence, or other change in circumstances subsequent to the abandonment or decision not to seek or persist in seeking revival.

Obviously, delaying the revival of an abandoned application, by a deliberately chosen course of action, until the industry or a competitor shows an interest in the invention is the antithesis of an "unavoidable" or "unintentional" delay. An intentional abandonment of an application, or an intentional delay in seeking the revival of an abandoned application, precludes a finding of unavoidable or unintentional delay pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137. See Maldague, 10 USPQ2d at 1478.

The Office does not generally question whether there has been an intentional or otherwise impermissible delay in filing an initial petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) or (b), when such petition is filed: (A) within 3 months of the date the applicant is first notified that the application is abandoned; and (2) within 1 year of the date of abandonment of the application. Thus, an applicant seeking revival of an abandoned application is advised to file a petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137 within 3 months of the first notification that the application is abandoned to avoid the question of intentional delay being raised by the Office (or by third parties seeking to challenge any patent issuing from the application).

Where a petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) or (b) is not filed within 3 months of the date the applicant is first notified that the application is abandoned, the Office will consider there to be a question as to whether the delay was unavoidable or unintentional. In such instances, the Office will require:

- (A) a showing as to how the delay between the date the applicant was first notified that the application was abandoned and the date a 37 CFR 1.137(a) petition was filed was "unavoidable"; or
- (B) further information as to the cause of the delay between the date the applicant was first notified that the application was abandoned and the date a 37 CFR 1.137(b) petition was filed, and how such delay was "unintentional."

To avoid delay in the consideration of the merits of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) or (b) in instances in which such petition was not filed within 3 months of the date the applicant was first notified that the application was abandoned, applicants should include a showing as to how the delay between the date the applicant was first notified by the Office that the application was abandoned and the filing of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137 was (A) "unavoidable" in a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a); or (B) "unintentional" in a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(b).

Where a petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) or (b) is not filed within 1 year of the date of abandonment of the application (note that abandonment takes place by operation of law, rather than by the mailing of a Notice of Abandonment), the Office will require:

(A) further information as to when the applicant (or the applicant's representative) first became aware of the abandonment of the application; and

(B) a showing as to how the delay in discovering the abandoned status of the application occurred despite the exercise of due care or diligence on the part of the applicant (or applicant's representative) (see Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. at 32-33).

To avoid delay in the consideration of the merits of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) or (b) in instances in which such petition was not filed within 1 year of the date of abandonment of the application, applicants should include:

(A) the date that the applicant first became aware of the abandonment of the application; and

(B) a showing as to how the delay in discovering the abandoned status of the application occurred despite the exercise of due care or diligence on the part of the applicant.

In either instance, applicant's failure to carry the burden of proof to establish that the "entire" delay was "unavoidable" or "unintentional" may lead to the denial of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) or 37 CFR 1.137(b), regardless of the circumstances that originally resulted in the abandonment of the application.

E. Party Whose Delay is Relevant

The question under 37 CFR 1.137 is whether the delay on the part of the party having the right or authority to reply to avoid abandonment (or not reply) was unavoidable or unintentional. When the applicant assigns the entire right, title, and interest in an invention to a third party (and thus does not retain any legal or equitable interest in the invention), the applicant's delay is irrelevant in evaluating whether the delay was unavoidable or even unintentional. See Kim v. Quigg, 718 F. Supp. 1280, 1284, 12 USPQ2d 1604, 1607-08 (E.D. Va. 1989). When an applicant assigns the application to a third party (e.g., the inventor/applicant's employer), and the third party decides not to file a reply to avoid abandonment, the applicant's actions, inactions or intentions are irrelevant under 37 CFR 1.137, unless the third party has reassigned the application to the applicant prior to the due date for the reply. Id.

Likewise, where the applicant permits a third party (whether a partial assignee, licensee, or other party) to control the prosecution of an application, the third party's decision whether or not to file a reply to avoid abandonment is binding on the applicant. See Winkler, 221 F. Supp. at 552, 138 USPQ at 667. Where an applicant enters an agreement with a third party for the third party to take control of the prosecution of an application, the applicant will be considered to have given the third party the right and authority to prosecute the application to avoid abandonment (or not prosecute), unless, by the express terms of the contract between applicant and the third party, the third party is conducting the prosecution of the application for the applicant solely in a fiduciary capacity. See Futures Technology Ltd. v. Quigg, 684 F. Supp. 430, 431, 7 USPQ2d 1588, 1589 (E.D. Va. 1988). Otherwise, the applicant will be considered to have given the third party unbridled discretion to prosecute (or not prosecute) the application to avoid abandonment, and will be bound by the actions or inactions of such third party.

F. Burden of Proof to Establish Unavoidable or Unintentional Delay

37 CFR 1.137(a)(3) requires a showing to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) was unavoidable. Therefore, the Office will require the applicant in every petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) to carry the burden of proof to establish that the delay from the due date for the reply until

the filing of a grantable petition was unavoidable. See Haines, 673 F. Supp. at 316-17, 5 USPQ2d at 1131-32.

37 CFR 1.137(b)(3) requires that a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(b) must be accompanied by a statement that the entire delay in providing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(b) was unintentional, but also provides that "[t]he Commissioner may require additional information where there is a question whether the delay was unintentional." While the Office will generally require only the statement that the entire delay in providing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(b) was unintentional, the Office may require an applicant to carry the burden of proof to establish that the delay from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition was unintentional within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. 41(a)(7) and 37 CFR 1.137(b) where there is a question whether the entire delay was unintentional. See Application of G, 11 USPQ2d at 1380.

G. Terminal Disclaimer Requirement

37 CFR 1.137(c) requires that a petition under either 37 CFR 1.137(a) or 1.137(b) be accompanied by a terminal disclaimer (and fee), regardless of the period of abandonment, in:

- (A) a design application;
- (B) a nonprovisional utility application filed before June 8, 1995; or
- (C) a nonprovisional plant application filed before June 8, 1995.

The terminal disclaimer must dedicate to the public a terminal part of the term of any patent granted thereon equivalent to the period of abandonment of the application, and must also apply to any patent granted on any continuing application entitled under 35 U.S.C. 120 to the benefit of the filing date of the application for which revival is sought. The terminal disclaimer requirement of 37 CFR 1.137(c) does not apply to lapsed patents.

The filing of a terminal disclaimer is not a substitute for unavoidable or unintentional delay. See Application of Takao, 17 USPQ2d at 1159. The requirement that the entire delay have been unavoidable (37 CFR 1.137(a)) or at least unintentional (37 CFR 1.137(b)) is distinct from the requirement for a terminal disclaimer. Therefore, the filing of a terminal disclaimer cannot excuse an intentional delay in filing a petition or renewed petition to revive an abandoned application. Likewise, an unavoidable or unintentional delay in filing a petition or renewed petition to revive an abandoned application will not warrant waiver of the terminal disclaimer requirement of 37 CFR 1.137(c).

In the event that an applicant considers the requirement for a terminal disclaimer to be inappropriate under the circumstances of the application at issue, the applicant should file a petition under 37 CFR 1.183 (and petition fee) to request a waiver of this requirement of 37 CFR 1.183. Such a petition may request waiver of this requirement in toto, or to the extent that such requirement exceeds the period considered by applicant as the appropriate period of disclaimer. The grant of such a petition, however, is strictly limited to situations wherein applicant has made a showing of an "extraordinary situation" in which "justice requires" the requested relief. Such situations are namely when:

- (A) the abandonment of the application caused no actual delay in prosecution (e.g., application revived solely for copendency with a continuing application whose prosecution was unaffected by the abandonment, or an application awaiting decision by the Board of Appeals and Interferences during period of abandonment); or
- (B) the patent term is otherwise capped by the 20-year patent term as set forth in 35 U.S.C. 154(b) (e.g., revival of an application is sought solely for purposes of copendency with an application (other than for a design patent) filed on or after June 8, 1995, or the 20-year patent term provided by 35 U.S.C. 154(b) would be longer than 17 years from grant less the period of abandonment).

Forms PTO/SB/62 and PTO/SB/63 may be used when filing a terminal disclaimer in accordance with 37 CFR 1.137(c).

H. Request For Reconsideration

37 CFR 1.137(d) requires that any request for reconsideration or review of a decision refusing to revive an abandoned application or lapsed patent must be filed within 2 months of the decision refusing to revive or within such time as set in the decision. 37 CFR 1.137(d) further provides that, unless a decision indicates otherwise, this time period for requesting reconsideration or review may be extended under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136.

37 CFR 1.137(d) specifies a time period within which a renewed petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137 must be filed to be considered timely. Where an applicant files a renewed petition, request for reconsideration, or other petition seeking review of a prior decision on a petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137 outside the time period specified in 37 CFR 1.137(d), the Office may require, inter alia, a specific showing as to how the entire delay was "unavoidable" (37 CFR 1.137(a)) or "unintentional" (37 CFR 1.137(b)). As discussed above, a delay resulting from the applicant deliberately choosing not to persist in seeking the revival of an abandoned application cannot be considered "unavoidable" or "unintentional" within the meaning of 37 CFR 1.137, and the correctness or propriety of the decision on the prior petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137, the correctness of the applicant's (or the applicant's representative's) decision not to persist in seeking revival, the discovery of new information or evidence, or other change in circumstances subsequent to the abandonment or decision to not persist in seeking revival are immaterial to such intentional delay caused by the deliberate course of action chosen by the applicant.

I. Provisional Applications

37 CFR 1.137 is applicable to a provisional application abandoned for failure to reply to an Office requirement. A petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) or (b) must be accompanied by any outstanding reply to an Office requirement, since 37 CFR 1.137(a)(1) and 1.137(b)(1) permit the filing of a continuing application in lieu of the required reply only in a nonprovisional application.

35 U.S.C. 111(b)(5) provides that a provisional application shall be regarded as abandoned 12 months after its filing date and shall not be subject to revival thereafter. Thus, 37 CFR 1.137(e) provides that a provisional application "may be revived pursuant to this section so as to be pending for a period of no longer than twelve months from its filing date" and that "[u]nder no circumstances will a provisional application be regarded as pending after twelve months from its filing date."

A provisional application may be abandoned prior to 12 months from its filing date for failure to reply to an Office requirement (e.g., failure to submit the filing fee and/or cover sheet). Applicant may petition to have an abandoned provisional application revived as a pending provisional application for a period of no longer than 12 months from the filing date of the provisional application where the delay was unavoidable or unintentional. It would be permissible to file a petition for revival later than 12 months from the filing date of the provisional application but only to revive the application for the 12-month period following the filing of the provisional application. Thus, even if the petition were granted to establish the pendency up to the end of the 12-month period, the provisional application would not be considered pending after 12 months from its filing date.